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1898

CUBAN INDEPENDENCE.

SPEECH

OF

HON. W. ^{William} D. VINCENT,
OF KANSAS,

IN THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

MONDAY, APRIL 18, 1898.

WASHINGTON,

1898.

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SPEECH
OF
HON. W. D. VINCENT.

On the majority and minority reports of the Committee on Foreign Affairs on the joint resolution authorizing intervention in Cuban affairs.

Mr. VINCENT said:

Mr. SPEAKER: The question that has been uppermost in the minds of the American people for many weeks past is this: Will the President and the Congress of the United States have the courage and the patriotism to give Cuba the freedom and independence she has long since proven herself entitled to? The members of this House and the country waited long and patiently for the President's message—a document which was said to be so radical and outspoken in behalf of Cuban liberty that its publication to the world was likely to excite a riot in Havana and cause the shedding of more American blood.

L. of C. The message was delayed day after day—from Monday until Wednesday, and from Wednesday until Monday again—to enable General Lee and other Americans to flee from the Spanish wrath that was to follow its publication. At last that fiery document, which we were promised would carry consternation to the Queen Regent and her bloody butchers upon the island, was placed before us. If it contained any language that was calculated to excite the Spanish or give great hope to the struggling Cubans, I am unable to recall what it was. It reads almost like an apology. Instead of declaring that Cuba must be free, the President requests Congress to grant him power to intervene and stop the war; and, in effect, Mr. Speaker, suggests that it may be necessary to turn our guns upon the Cuban army to accomplish the desired result. He certainly is opposed to independence, though upon this feature of the message there is great diversity of opinion.

The members of this House spent several hours in a discussion of the question, What did the President mean? The only answer that can be found in the message is the statement that the President desires to take measures "to secure in the island the establishment of a stable government." Attention has already been called to the fact that there is a vast difference between a stable government and an independent government. Canada has a stable government, but no one will pretend to claim that it is independent. Nowhere does the President say he is in favor of an independent government for Cuba. Why does he leave us to guess at his meaning? Why does he not say independence if that is what he means? The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that this message, like certain political platforms, means anything or nothing. It means either,

both, or neither, and its author has kindly permitted us to take our choice.

But what does the President mean when he says this:

Nor from the standpoint of expediency do I think it would be wise or prudent for this Government to recognize at the present time the independence of the so-called Cuban Republic.

What does this mean? Does it mean Cuban independence? Do the President's friends still insist that he is for independence, in the face of his declaration that it would be both unwise and imprudent? His friends on this floor, it seems to me, are doing him an injustice when they insist that he means the very opposite to what he says.

Mr. Speaker, whatever may have been the mistakes of the Administration in the past, we are now confronted with conditions which demand united and patriotic action. This House has already demonstrated by a unanimous vote that when our country is confronted by a foreign foe there are no divisions among us. In a crisis like the present one there should be no North, no South, no East, no West. There should be no Republicans, Democrats, or Populists, but we should all be Americans. Upon an issue of this kind not only the American Congress, but the American people stand almost as one man for our country, first, last, and all the time. They believe, as some one has said, that the mission of America is to foster liberty and drive despotism from this continent.

Mr. Speaker, every thoughtful man must shudder when he realizes that we are perhaps on the verge of what may prove to be a long and bloody conflict, but no true patriot is ready to raise his voice for peace at any price. There are some things worse even than death, and war means death to nobody knows how many of the best, brightest, and bravest of our citizens. War is an expensive way to settle difficulties, and should be resorted to as a last recourse. Disputes and differences between humane, God-fearing people ordinarily can best be settled by arbitration and mutual concessions, but how are we to arbitrate or reason with a nation that would tolerate a brutal butcher like Weyler and purposely starve thousands of its own innocent women and children to death?

The great destruction to life and property that must necessarily come as a result of war are not the only evils to be considered. Judging the future by the past, it is safe to say that the opportunity will be seized upon by those who manipulate our finances to issue more interest-bearing bonds. I predict that before the conflict has been going on two weeks the money lords of the nation will find some member of this House ready to serve them by introducing a bill for that purpose, and I shall be surprised if it fails to receive the votes of the majority. The war will give the agents of Shylock an excuse to do that which they dare not do in time of peace, and it will only be a repetition of history if they take advantage of the excitement and patriotism of the people to continue and increase the legalized robbery that has been going on since the war of the rebellion.

If those who deal in dollars fail to fleece one side or the other, or both, it will be their first failure. What they may lose on Spanish bonds they will try to make up by controlling the finances of our own Government. But I warn you that the American people have outgrown the idea that "a national debt is a national

bleeding." They know more about financial legislation and the effect of interest-bearing bonds that they did a few years ago, and if I am not mistaken they will be as bold to repudiate the political party that attempts to fasten perpetual debt upon them as they are now determined that Cuba shall have her independence. They are ready, as they have always been, to shed their blood for the cause of liberty and to perpetuate the spirit of '76, but they will not continue to tolerate and indorse legalized crime because it is perpetrated under the guise of "patriotism" and "national honor."

The United States is able to whip Spain and a dozen more such nations one after the other in quick succession without issuing one dollar of bonds. It can be done quicker and with less expense without bonds than with them. That nation which is unable to fight a successful war without fastening upon its people an interest-bearing debt is already whipped to start with. It may be true that no great nation has been successful in war that did not issue bonds, but it is also true that no great nation was ever whipped that did not do the same thing, and invariably the country that was conquered was the one that contracted the larger war debt as compared with its ability to pay.

It is a well-known fact that the war of the rebellion was prolonged as a result of the manipulations of the speculators who invested in bonds. While the boys in blue were baring their breasts to the enemy in a heroic struggle to save the Union for \$13 a month, the bond sharks were speculating upon their necessities and the necessities of the Government. At one time President Lincoln was so exasperated by their greedy and unpatriotic actions that he declared they ought to have their "devilish heads shot off."

If war comes, this same class of speculators will be strictly in evidence; in fact, they are in evidence now, and instead of consulting their wishes and acceding to their demands they should be classed with those who are responsible for the blowing up of the *Maine*.

Mr. Speaker, I am one of the many millions of people in this country who believe that war might have been averted if two years ago or one year ago, or even six months ago, Cuban independence or belligerent rights had been acknowledged by the Government of the United States. That would have placed the Cuban patriots upon an equality with Spain in their right to purchase munitions of war. It would have given Cuba a commercial standing that she has not been able to obtain without it. If this had been done, the hundreds of thousands who have starved to death upon the island as a result of Spanish brutality would to-day be living, and the brave seamen who met their untimely death on the battle ship *Maine* would have been spared.

All during the extra session and during the present session the minority in this House have used every effort to introduce and pass a resolution for Cuban recognition, but the Speaker has always found it convenient to rule them out of order. During the four months of the extra session when the most laborious part of the proceedings of this House was the Chaplain's prayer and voting upon motions to adjourn for three days at a time, we were not even granted the privilege of discussing the Cuban question.

I remember when the distinguished gentleman from Arkansas [Judge TERRY] stood upon his feet and shouted, "Mr. Speaker,"

over and over again in the attempt to gain recognition for the purpose of introducing a Cuban resolution, but he was utterly ignored by the Speaker, who calmly replied by saying, "I recognize the gentleman from Maine [Mr. DINGLEY]." The gentleman from Maine, who was at that time calmly reposing in his seat with his hands clasped behind his head gazing at the ceiling immediately arose and moved to adjourn. It is needless to say the motion carried. That was the manner in which the majority on this floor yearned to aid the struggling Cuban patriots during the extra session, and, up to a very recent date there has been no change in their policy, if indeed their actions are entitled to be dignified by the name policy.

Recognition at that time meant freedom for Cuba without war. To-day, perhaps, it is too late. Instead of doing that which 99 per cent of the American people wanted done and that which every political party promised should be done, we have been using our naval forces to guard our coasts so that supplies and munitions of war might not be transported to the Cuban army. Paying out the hard-earned dollars, Mr. Speaker, wrung from the taxpayers of this country to assist Spain in completing the conquest of Cuba.

Every proposition that has been proposed by those who seem to hold the destiny of Cuba in their power has carried with it the issuing of Cuban bonds. Not satisfied with the awful starvation and cruel barbarities that have been inflicted upon the inhabitants of that unhappy island, and for which we are largely responsible, the attempt has been made to compel Cuba to buy her freedom — to pay Spain the money she has spent in the cruel effort to completely annihilate her people. And then it was proposed by the majority in this House, as a last resort, that there should be intervention without independence. What does this mean? If it means anything, it means that Cuba shall yet buy her freedom by issuing bonds. It means that Cuban patriots must exchange masters, that instead of their present bondage to Spain they must become the slaves of the money lords of both Spain and the United States. Like the Saviour of the world, they are to be persecuted between two sets of thieves.

Mr. Speaker, this may be an inopportune time to discuss these matters and to criticise the actions or inaction of the President, but it is the first opportunity I have had. I would like to have said these things long ago, not only because they are true, but because I believe I voice the sentiments of a great majority of the people I have the honor to represent. I would not impugn the President's motives, but it is a humiliating fact that nobody has been able to give a satisfactory explanation for all this delay. I still have confidence in the President's honesty if he were permitted to carry out the dictates of his own conscience and judgment, but I believe he is in the power of advisers whose loyalty to the dollar exceeds their loyalty to the flag of our country. He is surrounded by a class of men who would mortgage the nation's honor and unborn generations to satisfy their greed for gold.

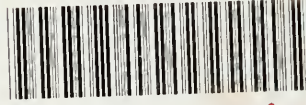
Mr. Speaker, if there is cause for intervention, there is still greater cause for independence. Every reason given by the President why our Government should interfere will apply with greater force upon the side of independence. In his message he suggests what he is pleased to call a "rational compromise." The only rational compromise. Mr. Speaker, at this late day is absolute,

unconditional, and immediate independence for Cuba. That is the only compromise that will meet the demands of justice and the wishes of the people of this country.

Let the members of this House unite, as we did in appropriating the \$50,000,000, in a unanimous vote for the Senate resolution, and thus demonstrate to the world that we hold patriotism above party, that there are no divisions among us upon the subject of Cuban independence, and that the infamous Spanish combination of brutality and incapacity shall forever cease upon the island. And last, but not least, let us remember the *Maine*.



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